



شبكة المعلومات البرلمانية الأفريقية
Africa Parliamentary Knowledge Network
Réseau d'informations parlementaires africaines

Draft framework of activities

Scope

The following proposed framework of the activities of the African Parliamentary Knowledge Network (APKN) is to be considered by the delegates to the International Conference on the African Parliamentary Knowledge Network in Cairo, June 2008. It is expected that the delegates to the conference will discuss and modify them as they deem appropriate and bring them into alignment with the Charter of the network that will be finalised at the Cairo's Conference.

No time frame or deadlines are included since the scope of this exercise is to determine the range of projects and related work the network may wish to undertake. For the same reason, a discussion of resources is deferred until agreement is reached on the initial activities. Resources can then be identified and plans and schedules can be formulated for subsequent approval.

The "*Africa i-Parliament Action Plan*" initiative of the UNITED NATIONS will provide support to the "Africa Parliamentary Knowledge Network" by:

- supporting the coordination and planning of the "Africa Parliamentary Knowledge Network";
- providing technical expertise to the Networks thematic areas and supporting the development of services for "knowledge-driven Parliaments";
- sponsoring the organisation of the annual "Africa Parliamentary Knowledge Network" conference;
- maintaining a knowledge repository to serve as a reference point for advisory services, e-training, best practices, etc.;
- providing proof-of-concept implementations of ICT applications which can then be deployed in the African Parliaments.

APKN Strategic Approach

The APKN strategic approach is to promote the exchange of experiences and information, develop continental level training and capacity initiatives, and encourage cooperation between parliaments. All these objectives utilize the unprecedented opportunities of Information and Communication Technology.

ICT makes it possible to create synergies and to provide high value training and information services, including e-learning modules, for parliaments in a cost-effective way while creating a critical mass necessary to build and sustain quality services.

More specifically the APKN will focus on:

- **Capacity Building.** Building capacity is an important goal of the network. Parliaments that neglect their learning and training needs severely affect their ability to fulfil their constitutional mandate. Developing a capacity building strategy requires both the commitment of financial resources and up-to-date knowledge and a key understanding of the importance of ongoing training and education.

Parliaments have to be able to make the transition to being a "learning organisation", that is an organisation whose Members and staff have the opportunity to continually expand their capacity and skills and where new patterns of thinking are nurtured.

- **Common information services and software applications.** Shared ICT services and applications are more and more necessary both in dealing with the huge amount of information available and in effectively managing information within parliaments.

Approach

The APKN will have a strategic opportunity to cooperate in the development of capacity building activities and shared information services in a way that is currently not done in the parliamentary domain. While benefiting from a collaborative development effort, the role of actually delivering and using these services would be left to national parliaments and local training institutions that are better equipped to provide them in a cost effective fashion.

Areas

It is proposed here that APKN focus its activities in the following the thematic areas:

- Legislative Process
- Information and Research
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Levels

APKN activities in the three thematic areas will be carried out at the following levels:

Legislation and Policy:	deals with information, data and analytical tools required to exercise informed oversight and to translate policies into effective legislation . Intended primarily for members, although some staff may also be interested.
Management:	deals with skills required to effectively deal with the management of parliamentary services (e.g legislative; information & research; ICT). Intended primarily for staff, although members may also be interested.
Professional Expertise:	deals with professional and technical skills required to effectively support the delivery of parliamentary services (e.g legislative; information & research; ICT). Intended primarily for staff, although members may also be interested.
Information Services:	deals with tools and applications to support information creation, dissemination and management in parliaments. Of interest to both members and staff.

Legislative Process

Managing effectively and openly proposed laws and their accompanying amendments is an essential requirement for modern legislatures in carrying out their law making responsibilities. Access to these documents through a process that is open serves to legitimize the authority of the parliament and provides one of the most important means of ensuring respect for the rule of law. In order to be able to benefit from the opportunities that an open and transparent legislative process can deliver, parliaments need to build certain technical and policy skills and capacities.

To increase legislative productivity it is necessary to streamline the internal drafting processes, establish legislative priorities and a legislative agenda, and allocate legislative drafting resources to effectively address the priorities and carry out the agenda. An effort should be made to make all documentation more easily available and transparent to all relevant stakeholders in parliament and outside parliament.

To this end it is proposed that the APKN - Legislative Process Group articulate its capacity building activities at the following levels:

Legislation and Policy:	Developing skills required to translate policy into legislation and assess legislation effectively.
Management:	Building skills required to effectively manage legislative and support services.
Professional Expertise:	Building skills required to effectively support legislative drafting and the legislative process.
Information Services:	Delivering capacity building services and software application to support bill drafting.

The list of activities below is not intended to be exhaustive and should not be taken as the plan of action of the APKN for the year ahead. It is meant to provide APKN members with a range a of possible activities in each thematic area and a base for discussion to identify the priority topics and activities that may lead to the definition of a plan of action to be eventually endorsed by APKN conference in Cairo.

Legislation and Policy Level: Proposed Activities

A tentative list of activities may include the following:

<p>Parliamentary rules and processes Understanding the different types of legislative documents (bills, amendments, etc.) and the rules and procedures under which they are considered and enacted, understanding the techniques that can be used by supporters, and by opponents, of a legislative measure, how to track and monitor the status of legislation.</p>
<p>Relations with constituents, stakeholders, and public How to communicate effectively with constituents, stakeholders, and public concerning the meaning of legislation and the effect of legislation on their lives.</p>
<p>Analysis of legislative documents How to read legislation, identify its formal elements, and discover its substance.</p>
<p>Oversight (ensuring laws are effectively implemented) Understanding why some agencies fail to implement effectively, and understanding the legislative options that are available.</p>
<p>Budgetary matters How the government raises and spends money, and the significance of this on legislation and the legislative process.</p>

Management Level: Proposed Activities

A tentative list of activities may include the following:

<p>Legislative Service: establishing, managing and supporting Developing a service that enables a parliament to meet its legislative responsibilities is imperative and one of the first tasks a legislature must accomplish. Although the specific responsibilities will vary based on the role of the legislature within a country, they will normally encompass the preparation, editing, management, dissemination, and preservation of documents that record the activities and decisions of the parliament. This usually involves preparing and tracking draft legislation, proposed amendments, debate, and votes at the plenary level and often at the committee level. The exchange of information, experiences, and technical among parliaments would be highly beneficial.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Institutionalisation: An effective parliament should attract, develop, and retain a corps of professionals to support the legislative process. Legislative Services should provide specialized skills and knowledge, highly capable, career, nonpartisan professionals from legal, clerical, and other fields and work as an "institutional memory".● Professional development strategies: Through the use of skill matrices and self assessment tools, parliaments can assess their capacity level and evaluate gaps in capacities and skills that need to be filled and design professional development strategies to fill the skill-gaps.
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Professional Expertise Level: Proposed Activities

A tentative list of activities may include the following:

Legislative process capacity building: materials and services

Training materials are needed to support the development of managerial, professional, and technical skills required to provide high quality legislative support to the parliament. Skills matrices and self assessment tools will enable parliaments to determine what skills and knowledge are needed for their members and staff and to assess the current level of those skills and knowledge. A tentative list of topics may include:

- **Legislative process: principles and roles**
 - The function of legislation
 - Legislative drafting and the policy process,
 - Legislative drafting and ethics
 - Legislative process
 - The role and responsibility of the legislative drafter
- **Legislative drafting (based on [Drafting Guidelines for Africa](#))**
 - General principles
 - Linguistic aspects
 - Structure of legislative acts
 - Normative references
 - Modifications
 - Amendments
 - Norms over time
- **Bill and amendment summaries**
 - Explanations of a bill's intent
 - Roles of the drafter and bill clerks
- **Analytic reports**
 - Documents that provide analysis of an issue
 - Review of options and possible impacts
- **Parliamentary research and analysis**
 - Effective legal research: sources and methods
 - Judicial and administrative interpretation of statutes
 - Delegated legislation
 - Criminal provisions
 - Negotiating, drafting, and giving effect to international agreements
 - Extra-territorial legislation
 - Limits on legislation imposed by constitutional law
 - Limits on legislation imposed by international law

Information Services Level: Proposed Activities

In order to support the work of Members and parliamentary staff the following information systems, services and applications could prove very valuable:

APKN e-Learning portal.

A portal to offer technology-enabled educational materials to cater both for Members and the different parliamentary skills. Materials may include full courses, course modules, and other educational resources. Some of these materials may be

used for self-paced training and others will serve as support and complementary material for traditional face-to-face training.

Legislative Drafting online repository.

The current "Legislative Drafting Guidelines" (<http://drafting.akomantoso.org/>) should become an online reference point for people drafting legislation and dealing with legislative process.

Bill Drafting Editor.

An editor to support drafters in writing bills in the proper format and structure. It should also be able to perform functions such as automatically renumbering internal reference and warn if any of them has been "broken" due to changes during the amendment process.

Information and Research

Parliamentarians must address a broad array of complex issues as they develop legislation and debate public policies. It is of strategic importance to be able to have the capacity and skills within the parliament to provide policy makers and citizens the best possible research relevant to the problems they are attempting to solve. In addition, policy makers and citizens need to learn how to apply such research results and to understand the benefits and limitations of available information sources.

Evidence-based Policy Making, i.e., public policy informed by rigorously established objective evidence can help parliaments in making better informed decisions about legislative proposals, programmes, and projects by putting the best research results at the heart of policy development. This approach stands in contrast to opinion-based policy, which relies heavily on the untested views of individuals or groups, often inspired by ideological standpoints or speculative conjecture.

In order to be able to benefit from the opportunities that Evidence-based Policy Making can deliver, parliaments need to:

- build research & analysis skills to gather information and data
- critically appraise them
- make use of high quality research evidence
- and in general make more use of the traditional and new sources of information.

Librarians and researchers need to have the expertise to access a broad array of digital resources, validate the source, and identify those that are most useful to respond to questions posed by members and other staff and to support data-driven policy formulation.

To this end it is proposed that the APKN - Information and Research Group would articulate its capacity building activities at the following levels :

Legislation and Policy:	Building skills required to make use of information and data for policy formulation, analysis and evaluation.
Management:	Building skills required to manage information and research services.
Professional Expertise:	Building skills required to gather, interpret and present information and data.
Information Services:	Delivering high value information services and software applications for libraries and digital collections.

The list of activities below is not intended to be exhaustive and should not be taken as the plan of action of the APKN for the year ahead. It is meant to provide APKN members with a range of possible activities in each thematic area and a base for discussion to identify the priority topics and activities that may lead to the definition of a plan of action to be eventually endorsed by APKN conference in Cairo.

Legislation and Policy Level: Proposed Activities

The key benefit of providing information and research services in support of “evidence-based policy making” (EbPM) is producing better policies that are effective and forward-looking. Members need to be able to apply sound evidence to the policy making process rather than respond to short-term pressures so that they address the causes and not just the symptoms of problems.

Evidence for policy has three main components:

- validated data (facts, trends, survey information)
- analytical reasoning that sets the data in context
- stakeholder opinions on an issue or set of issues

Through this comprehensive approach policy-makers can ensure that all points of view are considered and the available evidence is applied appropriately.

The topics proposed for this area would deal with how to assist members locate and assess research and evaluation studies, how to weigh the significance of such studies, and how to incorporate these into the broader social and political context in which they must make their own policy decisions.

A tentative list of activities may include the following topics:

Evidence-based policy

- **How to Read Research Findings.**
Tools for public officials and other stakeholders to become independent experts. The “minimum core skill level” is to be an effective practitioner of evidence-based policy: The ability to read a study and readily assess whether it produced valid evidence of a program’s effectiveness.
- **What kinds of studies can produce rigorous evidence of an intervention’s effectiveness?**
How to build scientifically-valid evidence about the effectiveness of a program, policy, or practice that is strong enough to help inform policy decisions. What are the cycles of EbPM and the different stages of studies/evidence? What types of study designs are capable of generating such evidence?
- **What Constitutes Valid Evidence of a Program’s Effectiveness?**
To assess the effectiveness of programs and help inform management actions, budget requests, and legislative proposals directed at achieving results there is need for reliable evidence to inform program planning and to corroborate program results.

Management Level: Proposed Activities

A tentative list of activities may include the following:

Information & Research Service: establishing, managing and supporting.
Developing an information and research service that meets parliament’s business needs is imperative. One of the important challenges confronting parliaments is to put in place an information and research service whose goals are in line with the goals of the parliament at large.

- **Institutionalisation:** Legislatures need objective and non-partisan professional librarians and policy analysts who can provide high quality information and research support to members and committees. This group will serve all members and all parties.
- **Professional development strategies:** Through the use of skill-matrices and self-assessment tools, parliaments can assess their capacity level and evaluate the gaps in capacities and skills that may need to be filled to support information and research services designed to enhance evidence-based policy making.

Professional Expertise Level: Proposed Activities

A tentative list of activities may include the following:

Information & Research capacity building.

Creating training modules to support the development of managerial and technical skills required to provide professional information, documentation and research services to the parliament. Skills matrices and self assessment tools will enable parliaments to determine what skills and knowledge are needed for their members and staff and to assess the current level of those skills and knowledge. A tentative list of topics may include:

- **Information Sources Internet Searching.** Three main areas of focus: the use of the Internet for information searching and communication, evaluating Internet resources, and the use of the Internet in libraries and information agencies.
- **Parliamentary Library Searching.** To familiarize staff with the library's information resources and ways of searching for these materials.
- **Information Management and Records Management:** Good records and information management is essential if the parliaments are to meet the requirements of data protection, access to information, and archiving. There is a need to learn how to effectively manage the entire life cycle of parliamentary records, in whatever format, from creation through to destruction or transfer to the national archives or to approved places of deposit.
- **Electronic records management:** The vast majority of parliamentary records are now produced electronically. There is need to ensure that this information is both stored securely and easily accessible. Parliaments face a significant challenge in establishing digital archives of their documents and actions. Providing permanent access to digital resources is critical for a parliament if it is to ensure the authenticity of digital documents and a permanent institutional record.

Information Services Level: Proposed Activities

In order to support the work of members and parliamentary staff the following information systems, services, and applications could prove very valuable:

APKN Portal

A common portal to provide access to policy-relevant information, news, and legislation relevant to African Parliaments. It will be built through cooperative efforts of parliaments and possibly in partnership with news agencies, universities, and research institutions in order to provide parliament with sustainable high quality information and data for policy debate and decision making.

More specifically the work may focus on **Africa News Monitor (ANM)** a news portal based on data mining technologies developed by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC). The system will gather on-line news reports from news portals world wide, in different languages, analyse and classify the content of the reports, aggregate the information, issue alerts and produce intuitive visual presentations of the information found.

Africa Parliamentary Information Exchange (APEX)

The APEX is a tool to improve exchange of information between the national parliaments and the Pan Africa Parliament, and among African parliaments themselves. National parliaments in Africa may take part, with the degree of involvement decided by each parliament. Each parliament is encouraged to inform the other parliaments of its activities concerning cross-national initiatives and the recommendations of the Pan African Parliament.

Deployment of Library Information System KOHA (www.koha.org) and Digital Institutional Repositories DSPACE (www.dspace.org)

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can empower parliaments to better fulfill their democratic functions by providing MPs and parliamentary administrations with access to documents and information in order to improve their efficiency, transparency, accountability and accessibility. ICT can be used to increase the quality of parliamentary services, facilitate the work of parliamentarians, and create new ways to promote the access of citizens and civil society to the work of parliaments.

Parliaments have to deal with new challenges of promoting, regulating and safeguarding the development of an equitable information society. Parliaments are the ideal institutional forum where the positive effects of new technologies can be enabled, monitored and appraised in terms not only of economic development but also of the need to protect the citizen's rights and the more deprived and disadvantaged sectors of society.

To benefit from the opportunities that ICT can deliver, parliaments need to build expertise to deal with, on the one hand, the managerial and technical capacities to deploy ICT effectively within the legislature and, on the other hand, the legal and regulatory issues of the information society. Although there will be an initial policy focus on issues related to the information society, it is anticipated that in the long term, other policy issues might be addressed.

To this end it is proposed that the APKN - ICT Group would articulate its capacity building activities at the following levels:

Legislation and Policy:	Acquiring knowledge and skills required by parliamentarians to formulate policies and laws that foster the development of the information society.
Management:	Building skills required to manage ICT services.
Professional Expertise:	Building skills required to deploy, manage and effectively use ICT in Parliament.
Information Services:	Delivering parliamentary applications, open standards for parliamentary documents and information and capacity building services.

The list of activities below is not intended to be exhaustive and should not be taken as the plan of action of the APKN for the year ahead. It is meant to provide APKN members with a range of possible activities in each thematic area and a base for discussion to identify the priority topics and activities that may lead to the definition of a plan of action to be eventually endorsed by APKN conference in Cairo.

Legislation and Policy Level: Proposed Activities

A tentative list of activities may include the following:

Leadership role: Institutional arrangements.

By exercising their legislative, representative, and oversight functions and responsibilities, parliaments can address the challenges associated with creating the information society in developing countries and play a leadership role in this field. What are some of the contemporary challenges, what are the different ways in which parliaments have become effective players in shaping the information society and what are the different institutional approaches to information society issues depending on their organization and political environment.

Legislative frameworks and institutional architectures: Role of Parliament in advancing the Information Society.

In a sector as dynamic as ICT, implementation strategies and policy outcomes need to be constantly monitored and evaluated and decision-makers nimble and responsive to change while ensuring long term stability and certainty. Governance is a determining factor of successful communications sector reform.

Internet rights and governance: Guaranteeing fundamental rights.

Parliaments have to deal with new challenges of promoting, regulating and safeguarding the development of an equitable Information Society. Main issues here are: expanding opportunities for citizens to access public information and actively participate in policy formulation; ensuring citizen rights of expression in the evolving Internet world; data protection and cyber-crimes. The deployment of the new technologies should be monitored and appraised not only in terms of economic development but also of the need to protect the citizen's rights and the more deprived and disadvantaged sectors of society.

Information Society and Knowledge Economy: accessibility and collective interest.

Access to knowledge is an issue in the Information Society that is characterised by the constant creation of knowledge, whose scarcity is not primarily the effect of naturally-occurring events but of deliberate commercial policies. This artificially-created scarcity of information/knowledge could deprive millions of people of extraordinary possibilities for their individual and communal growth especially in Africa where access to knowledge is also key for its development.

Open Source Software and Open Standards.

The Internet owes its explosive growth and impact to its foundation on open standards and open software. Studies indicate that moving from proprietary software to open standards and open source software in public administration may have a considerable economic impact. African parliaments now have the opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, the open software movement. Legislative support for open software and open standards also has the potential to influence the development of the information technology industry in Africa positively. Enabling greater user control of software and systems development in Africa could mean both more opportunity to localise applications to the specific situation and languages and also to build synergies for a more indigenous and sustainable software industry.

Management Level: Proposed Activities

A tentative list of activities may include the following:

<p>Institutionalisation of the Chief Information Officer. Parliaments need to consider the institutionalisation of the Chief Information Officer (CIO) to ensure that the allocation of parliament's knowledge management resources support the needs of the parliament and reflect the parliament's strategic information management and technology priorities.</p>
<p>ICT Service: establishing, managing, and supporting. Developing an ICT service structure that meets parliament's operational needs is essential. One of the most critical challenges confronting parliaments is to put in place an ICT service whose goals are clearly in line with the goals of the parliament at large.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Institutionalisation: A professional and highly competent ICT staff who can provide critical services is essential to ensuring that parliament can fulfill its legislative and representational mandates. Staff must be well trained and be provided with opportunities for continuous learning.● Establishing learning and professional development strategies. Through the use of skill-matrices and self-assessment tools, parliaments can assess their capacity level and evaluate the gaps in capacities and skills that may need to be filled.
<p>ICT management.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Vision: Vision and goals for ICT;● Planning: Strategic planning; Programme / project formulation; Business case development: cost/benefit analysis;● Management & Implementation: Leadership and high level management; Project management; Requirements management; Test management & quality assurance; Enterprise architecture (management); Financial management budgeting; Staffing and staff development;● Standards & compliance: Transparency; access to documents and activities; Privacy; Archiving policies and practices; Open Source standards and licenses; Network usage policy; Email and Internet acceptable usage policy; System security policy; Open Source and collaborative development approach.
<p>Collaborative Software Development (Open Source Software). Open Source applications allow parliaments to achieve long-term ownership of the solution and through it exercise a greater degree of control over issues such as cutting operational costs, support, maintenance, software obsolescence and future development. The possibility to customise Open Source applications according to specific needs and languages is a very important factor in the context of Africa and the many indigenous languages spoken on the continent.</p>
<p>Open Access (Open Standards). Parliaments are major producers of data and information that are vital for the democratic well being of a country and form the lifeblood of political participation. Parliamentary documents need to be made public in a way that complies with open access and open standards principles (not just from a technical standpoint but also in the spirit of "open parliament").</p>

Professional Expertise Level: Proposed Activities

A tentative list of activities may include the following:

ICT capacity building.

Training materials can support the design, implementation and the use of ICT infrastructure to best support the parliament. Skills matrices and self assessment tools will enable parliaments to determine what skills and knowledge are needed for their members and staff and to assess the current level of those skills and knowledge. A tentative list of topics may include:

- **ICT Services.** e-Mail; Office productivity applications; Internet and search services; Legislative drafting tools; Managing content of Intranet and Internet;
- **Technologies and infrastructure.** Help-desk and user support; Desktop/laptop management; Server management; Network management; Data management; Application development (including programming XML, Bungeni installation and configuration, CSS etc); Voice communications; Audio and video technologies / conferencing; Security
- **Management of Software Applications.** e-Mail Server; Web Server; Web based Content Management Systems supporting WEB2.0: blogs, online discussions, petitioning, RSS feeds, W3C accessibility, collaboration tools (Wiki's); Library Information System; Institutional Digital Repository; ICT support for libraries and information centres; Repositories for Committee documents and activities; Repositories for Plenary documents and activities
- **Programming Skills.** XML goals and usage; Python, Java and JavaScript skills; Relational databases; Installation, setup and configuration of Bungeni Portal and Editor; How to customize Bungeni functionality with system parameters; Advanced customization: How to extend Bungeni / writing extensions for Bungeni; Customizing the Bungeni Skin (CSS, HTML, Zope skins)
- **Facilitating Access (Websites).** To achieve transparency and accountability, parliaments need to create an authoritative, accessible, and engaging website that is accurate and timely, provides a complete and understandable view of parliamentary activities, offers multiple formats and channels of access, and contains the full range of institutional and legislative content.

Information Services Level: Proposed activities

In order to support the adoption of ICT and support open access to information the following information services and applications could prove very valuable:

APKN e-Learning portal.

A portal to offer technology-enabled educational materials to cater both for members and the different parliamentary skills. Materials may include full courses, course modules, and other educational resources. Some of these materials may be used for self-paced training and others will serve as support and complementary material for traditional face-to-face training.

[Bungeni](#) A collaborative software development initiative based on open standards and open source applications that provides a leading solution for drafting, managing, consolidating and publishing legislative and other parliamentary documents.

[AKOMA NTOSO](#)

“Architecture for Knowledge-Oriented Management of African Normative Texts using Open Standards and Ontologies” defines a set of simple, technology-neutral representations of parliamentary documents for e-services in a Pan-African context.

ICT - Section - African Cooperative Parliamentary Portal (ACPP).

Within the context of ACPP a section, in collaboration with parliaments and research institutions, could be dedicated to - ICT issues, policies and data in order to provide parliaments with update information and data for policy debate and decision making.